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SUBJECT: GALAPAGOS PARK MANAGEMENT: ONE STEP FORWARD; TWO STEPS BACK

1. Summary. In a move that strengthens the directorship of the Galapagos National Park (GNP), the GOE has established a transparent and independent selection process for park directors. But this positive move is undermined by a parallel resolution by SENRES -- the national technical secretariat in charge of public sector wages -- that ends a

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favorable salary program used to attract well-qualified personnel to the Galapagos. The SENRES decision has caused uproar among both the affected government workers and NGOs operating in the Galapagos. More importantly, in conjunction with last year's 30% reduction in park staff, the resolution may undermine the GOE's ability to effectively manage the park. End Summary.

ONE STEP FORWARD: DE-POLITICIZING THE DIRECTORSHIP

2. Environment Minister Alban signed an agreement in August 2005 with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to establish a transparent and independent selection process for park directors. The new selection process, the details of which are based on a proposal developed by outside consultants and funded by USAID, UNDP, and IDB, seeks to replace a highly politicized process that resulted in 13 Park Directors in the last 2 years. While the use of the park directorship for political purposes was particular to former President Gutierrez, it left a weakened GNP in its wake. The MOE is expected to initiate the new selection process on September 20. The GNP currently is managed by an interim director.

3. The new selection process, while not ideal, nonetheless represents a step forward in the effort to strengthen the management of the park. The GOE-UNDP agreement requires that future directors have an appropriate level of work experience and educational background in environmental sciences and management. Recent park directors more often than not lacked such knowledge. Transparency being a major concern in past appointments, the agreement also calls for an independent four-member committee to manage the hiring process and to publicly provide details as to why and how they made their decision. Unfortunately, the agreement does not provide for job security, something that the consultant's proposal considered vital.

TWO STEPS BACK? SALARY BENEFITS ELIMINATED

4. The August 2005 SENRES resolution that created wage equality for public officials across all Ecuadorian provinces essentially overturned a provision of the Galapagos Special Law that calls for government officials in the Galapagos to earn an extra 100% of their salary. International donors, NGOs, and those managing the park consider this provision necessary to attract well-qualified personnel to serve in the Galapagos, where the cost of living is high relative to the mainland.

5. Park operators and NGOs (both international and domestic) have approached President Palacios, Minister Alba, and Galapagos Deputy Alfredo Serrano requesting support. They are requesting a GOE determination that the Special Law take precedence over the SENRES resolution. While President Palacios has been silent on the issue, his legal advisor has informally agreed with their position. Minister Alba has taken no action on the request other than to suggest the Solicitor General might be able to decide. Serrano has taken up the matter directly with the Solicitor General, who has the authority to rule on the relative precedence of the law and resolution. The Solicitor General has yet to make a decision.

6. In discussions with EconOff, NGO leaders and government officials in the Galapagos have expressed three major concerns with respect to the SENRES resolution. First, morale has plummeted among government workers in the GNP and INGALA, the two main government institutions on the islands. Morale plays a crucial role in the park's monitoring effectiveness as workers already face an uphill battle against illegal fishermen who are better funded and better equipped. Second, government officials within the GNP and

INGALA have expressed doubt that they will be able to attract well-qualified personnel for important leadership positions, to include the new Park Director. For example, citing the surrounding uncertainty, one well-known boat operator who considered serving as captain of a key GNP monitoring and research vessel has reportedly decided to take a job with a tour operator instead. Third, the retention of existing personnel will become a problem. In particular, park wardens and boat operators are unlikely to renew their contracts in the coming year and will instead seek employment with tour operators and fishing interests where the pay will be higher. Those operators who choose to renew their contracts at a lower pay could be more susceptible to bribes.

17. Compounding these problems is a 2004 SENRES decision to reduce the number of GNP staff by 30%, from 220 to 154. This reduction already has hampered the GNP's ability to patrol the marine reserve, to monitor fishing catches, and to manage conservation. Park officials and NGOs fear that low morale and their inability to attract and retain well-qualified personnel will add to these problems and cause irreparable long-term harm to their monitoring and conservation efforts.

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